



Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Volunteer Position Description

Title: Midewin Youth Educator (Mighty Acorns Program, El Valor day camp, Midewin for Kids)

Purpose: The [Mighty Acorns® program](#) was developed by The Nature Conservancy and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and adopted by Chicago Wilderness in the 1990's. The curriculum was developed and field tested by formal and non-formal educators and volunteer stewards. This program introduces thousands of 4th through 6th graders to nature and conservation stewardship in the Chicagoland area, including Midewin, each year through activities based on education, restoration and exploration. The Mighty Acorns concept and activities are used for many other youth groups that visit Midewin in addition to local elementary school students, such as scouts, home school classes and summer day campers such as the [El Valor program](#) from Chicago. In general, Midewin youth educators help educate and inspire students to learn about local ecosystems and participate in stewardship activities. Midewin youth educators help directly with part one and two of our mission which are to conserve and enhance the native populations and habitats of fish, wildlife, and plants and to provide opportunities for scientific; environmental; and land use education.

Duties and Responsibilities: A youth educator will be trained to lead several nature lessons and stewardship activities appropriate for each season. Students in the Mighty Acorns program visit Midewin in fall, winter and spring. Students in the El Valor program visit two days in July and two days in August. Midewin will provide materials, props, safety gear and tools for each activity. Educators are trained to introduce required curriculum but also encouraged to practice and express their own fun messages and teaching style too. Lead educators are required to speak in front of classes up to 50 or more. Youth educators may be required to drive their personal vehicles to the program sites in various locations at Midewin. Programs mostly take place on-site, but occasional off-site opportunities are presented.

Department and Location: Under the direction of the Environmental Education Specialist, volunteer time and data is contributed to Midewin's Public Services Department. The primary check-in locations are the River Road Trailhead, Welcome Center, Iron Bridge Trailhead and Turtle Pond, but these may vary.

Qualifications: Youth Educators must be friendly and enjoy working with all ages and backgrounds. Educators must be able to express information to a variety of demographics and be aware of cultural differences. Educators are required to have excellent communication skills including being a clear, enthusiastic speaker and story teller. Part of educating is the ability to analyze information and construe meaning using general knowledge, specific knowledge or intuition. Youth Educators need to be organized, responsible and willing to train into a leadership role and also mentor others. Sometimes it's more about letting children play outside and feel safe than it is about having an agenda to get specific messages across. It's important to be able to recognize this.

Time Commitment: Midewin educators are needed year round. Most youth programs take place during the school year on weekdays, however summer youth programs are growing. Based on the current school programs scheduled, educators are asked to participate in 4 or more days (3 hour sessions) in each season they are available. Midewin does ask that once volunteers commit to a schedule in advance, they adhere to that commitment because this program requires stable coverage. In case of cancellation or schedule change, let the Volunteer Coordinator know at least 48 hours in advance.

Training: A meeting is held before each school cycle that will cover safety, protocols and available training materials. Educators should complete these trainings each season. Returning volunteers are encouraged to attend, as certain activities may change from year to year. New volunteers will shadow seasoned educators until they are comfortable and approved to take a lead role. Videos for certain trainings are available. Training opportunities are occasionally provided such as National Association of Interpretation certification and Environmental Education Association of Illinois workshops. Additional responsibilities could become applicable or available to this position in the future that might require additional training and/or certification. These additional responsibilities will be determined by the program managers and offered to selected volunteers.

Working Conditions/Physical Effort: *Educators are covered by the Volunteer Agreement (Form 301a) while performing duties described by this position description during the season(s) listed or scheduled shifts.* Educators must read, sign and consent to the U.S. Forest Service Job Hazard Analysis, which includes safety requirements and recommended best practices. Educators may work in variable conditions including:

- Exposure to outdoor weather conditions & allergens
- Standing for up to 2 hours or more at a time
- Walking on uneven ground for short distances
- Light to moderate lifting

Benefits: Many agree that people of all ages are becoming less connected to the natural world around them than ever before. This is a key role in creating fun experiences that represent good land ethic so that future generations realize the importance and beauty of nature and will pass it on. Educators will learn the history and the future plans of Midewin, share exciting environmental lessons and be a part of our mission along the way. Midewin's volunteer staff receives ongoing recognition from their supervisor and other staff. Volunteers that contribute three or more individual volunteer visits in the fiscal year will receive an invitation to an annual volunteer recognition banquet in November. Midewin's volunteer staff receives the bimonthly Prairie Telegraph. Volunteers may be featured in the telegraph, newspaper articles and/or U.S. Forest Service success stories. Awards can be received for outstanding, innovative and/or long term, core volunteers.